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## I am an Immigrant: My Journey to Texas

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My memory is vivid. It was 5:00 AM on Thursday February 1st, 2003. My dad stepped outside into the darkness of the early morning, his back lit only by the fluorescent lights on our front porch. My mom stepped in front of the main door, her arms gently holding my one year old brother; I could see the faint glimmers of tears rolling down her cheek. My young sister's sleepy hand barely held onto my mom's shirt. She has always been a heavy sleeper, and waking up so early to see my dad leave was too much to ask of her. She was just seven at the time.

My dad smiled at all of us one last time, and with a quick goodbye he got in a taxi that was waiting for him and left. I remember my ten year old body feeling heavy and paralyzed, every cell in my body trying to believe that I would see my dad again in two

weeks after his "business trip" was over, but my heart knew he was gone for good. I was now the man of the house.

I remember going to school, and feeling this surge of energy, this fire slowly growing inside of me that pushed me to study. "I have to study more" I thought, "I have to be the best one now, I have no choice". My father had always told me that education was the most important thing in life, how if anything were to happen to him, he wanted to be proud of saying that he gave the best possible education to me and my siblings.

My parents survived the civil war that took place in El Salvador from 1982 - 1992, a proxy war between the USA and the former Soviet Union. Because of this, and the extreme gang violence in El Salvador, my parents pushed education as a way out.

Finally, in 2005, my family and I were able to make it into the USA. I remember stepping onto the security gate that would take

me to the airplane, and looking back at my aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents; the family I grew up loving. I remember thinking the feeling of deep sorrow and sadness mixed with forceful hope and fake smiles was probably how my father felt when he left us that one Thursday morning.

I re-united with my dad that afternoon in Houston, Texas. He was skinnier than before, with less hair on his head, and with the bags of sleepless nights under his eyes. I remember not recognizing him for a few moments, he seemed like a shadow of his former self.

I enrolled in school almost a month after coming to Houston. I remember walking into my first class ever here in the USA, a seventh grade science class. Students were taking a test that day. The teacher spoke to me in English and tried his best to make me understand that I needed to do the test, even though it was my first day there. I tried my best to understand. I thought I lucked out

because it seemed the questions were asking about the Earth's orbit around the Sun. I had studied this and thought I'd do well. In the end, I was only able to make a D.

I remember the anxiety of not fitting in and not been able to communicate with my peers and teachers. That agonizing feeling of asphyxia when you want to say something but can't. Countless people told me I wouldn't learn English because it was too late to learn it, and even if did, I'd always have an accent and I would never fit in because of it. I was kept out of honor level classes at times because of it, and viewed with suspicion when joining group projects. But I proved them all wrong.

All throughout high school, I was involved in extracurricular activities and leadership roles. I wanted to be someone. I saw all the countless sacrifices that my parents made to give me the best life possible. All of it served as fuel and inspiration for me to aim

higher and higher. In high school I fell in love with video game design. I loved to create games to make people happy. I thought, what if I can use games for more than making people happy? What if I can use them to solve real problems?

That idea brought me to SHSU to study. I've been able to meet professors that have help me grow that idea into an actual plan I can research to better the community.

Despite the negative labels the media attaches to me, despite the way I'm treated when people hear my accent, despite the suspicious looks I get, I'd do it all over again. I have answered ignorance with action. I am still learning, growing, exploring, and looking at the world from many different perspectives. I have become an agent of change, all thanks to the golden opportunity I've been given, and remembering where I came from.